

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your ongoing leadership in coronavirus pandemic relief efforts for our nation. As we continue this work, the California delegation would like to highlight the importance of robust expansion of affordable rural broadband access in unserved areas. According to the latest U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadband Deployment Report, approximately one million Californians are considered unserved by terrestrial broadband internet. It also reports 18 million Americans lack basic broadband internet access, and experts agree the true number is far higher.

Rural communities in our home state of California and across the nation will continue to go disproportionately unserved without a proper plan of action to fund broadband deployment coming from the federal government. With 27 percent of rural Americans lacking reliable broadband in their homes, lack of internet access is a severe impediment to students' and schools' ability to transition to distance-learning models. Rural educators have already made significant investments into mitigating this problem - Kern County, for example, has already spent \$8 million on solutions like mobile devices and wireless hotspots for their students.

Effective public health services rely on stable broadband connectivity as well, a fact that has been underscored by the use of telehealth during this pandemic. Patients may have difficulty receiving appropriate health care if they are unable to interact with their provider through remote video communication. Americans without an Internet connection are also unable to access information provided online by federal, state, and local public health officials, increasing their vulnerability to the virus.

We are grateful for the federal investment from both the FCC's Universal Service Fund and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This includes an additional \$100 million to the Reconnect Pilot Program in the CARES Act, which will provide critical funding to deploy broadband infrastructure in eligible rural areas. However, we also know that significantly more investment is needed to ensure broadband is both accessible and affordable for all Californians. We ask for this investment in future COVID-relief legislation, and that the requirements for such programs consider the rural regions of California that continue to lack adequate funding.

Thank you again for your leadership during this crisis. As we look to the future of this virus and the technological advancements to come, innovative approaches for affordable, high-speed Internet nationwide are critical. We must not overlook our rural communities that, every day, disproportionately feel the detrimental effects of the “digital divide.” We look forward to working together in ensuring the communities we represent have the resources they need throughout this pandemic and beyond.

Sincerely,



TJ Cox
Member of Congress

/s/
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/
Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/
Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress